

# Oregon night singers



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Master Gardener

**Q**uestion: Most insects and animals are quiet at night, but not in our neighborhood! What kind of insects are awake and “singing” at night?

**A**nswer: Oregon night singers include grasshoppers, crickets and katydids; part of the insect order Orthoptera. Orthoptera are known for their long legs for jumping, stiff wings that fold against the body and noises made by rubbing their wings against each other or against their legs.

Members of the genus *Gryllus*, are the black, beefy field crickets found nearly everywhere, singing from ground level. Often hidden under cover, male crickets use their wings to make chirping sounds to attract a mate.

They rub a file on one wing against a scraper on the other. The front wings are modified not only to create sound, but amplify and broadcast it. Cricket chirps are musical to the human ear because their frequencies are low and pure.

Generally nighttime singers, crickets have a calling song which attracts females from a distance, a softer courtship song for close range and a rivalry song directed toward competing males.

The Fork-Tailed Bush Katydid (*Scudderia furcata*) is common in Oregon. Katydids get their name from the sound of the chirps they make (“Katy-did, Katy-didn’t”).

The male Fork-Tailed Bush Katydids have a split tail at the end of their abdomen. Chirping at any time of day, they are frequently found in bushes, thickets or shrubby areas. They have very long antennae and may resemble green leaves.

Their song consists of two to three chirps followed by periods



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of silence while they wait for a female response. Their mating song can sound buzzy or raspy to the human ear because its frequencies are higher and less pure than that of the cricket.

Okanagana is the most common genus of *Cicada* found in Oregon and are in the family of Cicadidae. Originally from the Okanagan Lake area in British Columbia, these cicadas are often black with white, beige or orange highlights on their wings and body. The black color of their exoskeleton helps them absorb



Blake Loy

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**Field crickets are found nearly everywhere. Male crickets use their wings to make chirping sounds to attract a mate or compete with other males.**

the warmth of the sun.

Cicadas are known for the loud noise they make, especially during the hottest part of the day. Songs play a key role in identifying this insect because male Okanagans sing at a constant syllable using a large muscle that vibrates inside a hollow cavity in the abdomen with a lid regulating the volume.

Regularly found at my house, the Snowy Tree Crickets (*Oecanthus fultoni*), whose song is a

continuous, measured series of chirps, gets their name because they are often so pale that they appear to be white.

Singing from bushy understorey

plants within open woods, their chirp rate can be used to estimate the temperature. One popular method is to count the number of songs given in 13 seconds and then add that number to 40 to yield the temperature in Fahrenheit.

Although we might not see these night singers, their communal chirping is an enjoyable and musical part of our Oregon summers.

*Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at [douglasmg@oregonstate.edu](mailto:douglasmg@oregonstate.edu) or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.*



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